

## Patience Is More Valuable Than A Sharp Comb At Shearing Time

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MERTZON — The shearing crew finished here last night. After four days of mad activity, the last half-rolled fleece was tossed in the sack. Before coming to our place, shearing operation was begun over at Young Goat Whisker's outfit. It had to start there because Whiskers was on the verge of selling out due to the shearers being a few weeks late.

You never saw a man in such a rush to shear. Fleece worms were nibbling on one end of his flock and needle grass was getting ready to start on the front side. He was keeping the telephone lines hot, trying to track down the crew. A platoon of hob-nail-booted soldiers wouldn't have worn down the carpets in his house any faster than his frantic pacing.

Whiskers is old enough to know better than to allow some little thing like worms or needles to upset him. As I told him, thousands of words of brilliant copy have been written on range management problems. Gigantic dilemmas of all sorts have been solved on paper by men who've spent their lives on college campuses studying the woes of the sheep industry.

Yet, on reflection, I had to admit that, to my knowledge, not one papered scholar nor classroom sheep expert has ever seen fit to discuss such trifling matters as sheep shearers being three weeks late while fleece worms methodically eat a mortal trench up old ewes' backs.

He was too stirred up to be consoled. If he could have collected his sense, he'd have admitted that the only reasons to shear in April or May are to keep from having too many dogie lambs and to get the wool to market before buyers become harder to deal with than the king of a Gypsy tribe. Ordinarily, he wouldn't have let the worms and needles bother him. He knows that during most springs it's so dry out here that it would be hard to raise a laboratory sample of fleece worms, and an old ewe would have to be plenty quick to wade through a patch of needle grass before the cows lapped it up.

But Whiskers had lost his patience, I might as well have tried to talk a juggler into buying a neck brace as to attempt to convince him the whole wide world wasn't going to pieces.

I overheard some other ranchers moaning about their shearing crews getting behind schedule. They were setting up an awful show as they rehashed stories about their shearing machines wandering around the countryside less than half staffed and losing ground every day. The reports sounded pretty bad. However, when you get right down to it, two or three 65-year-old shearers supported by a capitan and a half-drunk wool picker can trim a wide swath in a couple of thousand ewes if the owner won't rush them.

Getting sheared in a hurry is a disease in these parts. Patience is the only solution to the sheep rancher's problem. We're just going to have to learn that rushing a shearing crew is as senseless as trying to bring up an economy bill before Congress. All the interest from the Kennedy money wouldn't buy a 15-minute burst of speed from the brokest crew in the Shortgrass Country.

It was a relief to see the crew pulling out from the ranch. We may have to let the brush pull the wool off next year. Every spring the situation becomes more critical, and the only creatures on earth that seem to appreciate our product are the crows that steal clippings to build their nests.

As they were saying around town last week when the news came that the lamb market had broken \$3 a hundred in one market day, you've got to take the good with the bad to stay in the sheep business. As of this writing, we're away ahead on the bad part.